

USDAnews

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

Mike Johanns Takes The Helm As Our 28th Secretary

He Emphasizes To Employees Dignity, Respect, And Equality

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Mike Johanns, the son of Iowa dairy farmers, became the 28th secretary of agriculture in USDA's 143-year history on Jan. 21, 2005. He was sworn in by his predecessor, **Ann M. Veneman**, one day after the U.S. Senate confirmed his nomination by voice vote. He was the first new member of the second-term cabinet of President **George W. Bush** to be confirmed.

The first order of business by Johanns was to speak to USDA employees who had gathered in the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC.

In his remarks he applauded the concept of public service. "I have long believed that public service is more than a job; it truly is a calling," he told the Department's employees. "And so I thank each of you for heeding that calling."

Johanns pointed out that he is a strong believer in citizens having access to their government, adding that he had maintained an 'open door policy' when he served as governor of Nebraska and, earlier, as mayor of Lincoln, Neb.

"I said to the members of the subcabinet last week, and I'll say

it to you: Don't look for me to build an inner circle. I intend to reach out to the USDA to employees all over to get the best advice I can," he said.

He also made reference to President **Abraham Lincoln's** 1862 designation of USDA as the "People's Department." Johanns said, "...when people come to the Secretary's Office, whether that's you or people we work with across the country or across the world, there's one thing they can be absolutely certain of. And you have my promise of that today. And that is that you will be treated with respect, you'll be treated with dignity, equality."

Johanns brings first-hand experience of farm life and years of work on agricultural issues in his home state of Nebraska to USDA's top job.

During his confirmation hearing on January 6 before the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, he had said that, "I grew up in Mitchell County, Iowa, the son of dairy farmers. I woke with the sun to do the chores and we often finished after dark. At a very young age I learned discipline and commitment to purpose. I developed a deep respect for the land and a work ethic that helps to define who I am as a person. I will always be a farmer's son with an intense passion for agriculture."

He brought that passion to his public service in Nebraska where he served as mayor of the capitol, Lincoln, and then most

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Mike Johanns, the 28th secretary of agriculture (right), is sworn in by his predecessor **Ann M. Veneman**, the 27th secretary of agriculture (left). Johanns' wife, **Stephanie Johanns** (center), holds the Bible. Note the story on this page. —

PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH

USDA's FY 2006 Proposed Budget Emphasizes Priorities, Fiscal Discipline

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Characterizing it as "a budget for USDA that meets our most important priorities while exercising the kind of fiscal discipline that is absolutely necessary," Secretary **Mike Johanns** unveiled USDA's proposed budget for FY 2006 at a press conference on February 7 at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC.

He highlighted several items of importance in the Department's proposed budget, which he said provides funds to protect America's food supply and agriculture systems, improve nutrition and health, conserve and enhance

America's natural resources, and enhance economic opportunities for agricultural producers.

"There's no smoke and mirrors in these proposals because in my judgment budgets aren't magic—they are math," Johanns advised.

He then added that, "Like every agency, USDA will share the government-wide burden of controlling federal spending."

"At the same time, we must work hard to leverage other tools to maintain the strong farm economy—such as an aggressive trade agenda."

Highlights of USDA's FY 2006 budget proposal include the following items: deliver an estimated \$17 billion in farm program benefits while proposing reforms to better target agricultural assistance, promote more efficient production decisions, and extend

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Mike Johanns *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,
Last month when I addressed USDA employees on my first day as Secretary, I said that this job was a dream come true

for me. I wasn't exaggerating, and my first weeks haven't dimmed my enthusiasm. I have had a wonderful welcome here, and I'm eager to address the many issues facing us.

For those whom I haven't yet met, I'd like to explain a little about who I am and how I view the role of Secretary.

Agriculture holds a special place in my heart. I grew up on a dairy farm in Iowa. I did chores every morning, and I learned about the commitment and discipline that define our nation's farmers and ranchers.

I entered into public service in Nebraska, first at the local level, and eventually as Governor.

President **George W. Bush** also understands agriculture very well, which is one of the reasons I accepted this position. He is a friend of American farmers and ranchers, and of the USDA. It is an honor and a humbling experience to join his team and be able to work with you on issues that we will face together in the future.

To me, public service is more than a job; it is a calling. I am proud that so many good men and women are heeding that calling here at the USDA. There are other, easier ways to make a living, but I thank you for your commitment for serving others.

Along with our role as public servants come obligations. We work

for the American people. They have a right to have access to their government, and to expect that we will listen and be responsive to their concerns.

When people come to the Secretary's office, whether they are employees, stakeholders, or just visitors, there is one thing they can be certain of as long as I am Secretary: They will be treated with respect, dignity, and equality. I have every expectation that we will all embrace this standard in dealing with each other and with anyone who comes in contact with the USDA.

There are both challenges and opportunities ahead of us, and I look forward to tackling them together as a team. I hope to get to know as many of you on a personal level as possible. I have already seen much of the great work that is done here, and I am proud to work alongside you.

By working together, I am confident that we can help farmers and ranchers better compete in the world economy. We can ensure a safe, affordable, and abundant food supply. We can support healthier lifestyles for Americans. We can conserve our natural resources. We can strengthen our rural communities. We can continue to use sound science in our decisions. And, we can do our very best to serve the American people.

I appreciate the warm welcome that has been extended **Stephanie** and me, and I look forward to an exciting and productive time together at the USDA. ■

Our 28th Secretary...continued from pg. 1

recently as governor. There he dealt with a myriad of agricultural issues including: the state's five-year drought, conducting trade missions to sell American farm products, pursuing a larger role for Nebraska in ethanol production, and working for a safe environment for employees in that state's many meat packing plants.

In addition, while governor he visited all 93 counties in Nebraska in order to have face-to-face contact with citizens.

Johanns had served as governor of Nebraska from 1999 until joining USDA. He is the first sitting governor to then become USDA's secretary since **Orville Freeman**, at the time the governor of Minnesota, became USDA secretary in 1961.

Johanns is also the fourth USDA secretary from Nebraska. The Nebraskans who preceded him in that position were **Clayton Yeutter**, who served as the Department's secretary from 1989-91, **Clifford Hardin** (1969-1971), and **Julius Morton** (1893-1897).

Before becoming governor of Nebraska Johanns served two terms as mayor of Lincoln, Neb., from 1991-98. He was a member of the Lincoln City Council from 1989-91, after having served on the Lancaster County



OC public affairs specialist **Phil Shanholtzer** (right) offers congratulations to Secretary **Mike Johanns**, following remarks by Johanns to USDA employees gathered in the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC on January 24.—**PHOTO BY KEN HAMMOND**

(Neb.) Board of Commissioners from 1983-87. He practiced law in O'Neill, Neb., and then in Lincoln, after earning a law degree from Creighton University in Omaha. He holds a B.A. degree in communications from [then] St. Mary's College—now called "Saint Mary's

University of Minnesota"—in Winona, Minn. Born in Iowa, he grew up on his family's dairy farm near Osage, Iowa.

A complete copy of Johanns' remarks to USDA employees on January 24 is available at www.usda.gov. ■

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

Secretary of Agriculture **Mike Johanns** has made normalizing trade with former importers of U.S. beef a top priority. In the waning days of 2004, USDA adopted a final rule that establishes criteria for geographic regions to be recognized as presenting minimal risk of introducing BSE into the United States. Canada meets the standard and, in February, Johanns announced that trade in cattle and meat from Canadian animals 30 months and younger will resume in March. Those imports will be subject to reinspection at the border by Food Safety and Inspection Service personnel. In addition, the transport and ultimate disposition of the product will be tightly monitored.

USDA also is developing a plan to allow imports of Canadian beef and live animals 30 months and older for slaughter, and incremental progress to reopen trade with Japan continues.

Here at home, Secretary Johanns announced the President's fiscal year 2006 USDA budget (see page 1), and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program grant awards to 47 state agencies and tribal organizations, awarded \$22 million in Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds to 17 states, and announced \$125 million in international assistance under the Food for Progress program.

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program: On Feb. 1 Secretary Johanns announced all 47 grantees that provided \$15 million in coupons to low-income senior citizens the last fiscal year will continue to operate the program during the 2005 season.

The 2002 Farm Bill provided \$15 million each year to operate the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program through fiscal

year 2007. Under the program the grantees provide low-income seniors with coupons that can be exchanged for fresh produce at nearly 4,000 farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs. The grants are expected to serve over 800,000 low-income senior citizens nationwide, an increase from fiscal year 2004.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program: Seventeen states were awarded \$22.2 million in additional EQIP funds due to high levels of performance in implementing the program during 2004. "These awards recognize states that have achieved the greatest efficiency in delivering technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers. This program also helps producers comply with federal, state, and local environmental regulations," Secretary Johanns said. The 17 states include: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Food for Progress: Sixteen countries will be recipients of \$125 million of U.S. commodities that will be sold locally to fund economic or agricultural reforms that foster free enterprise in developing countries and emerging democracies. "America will continue to answer the call of those in need around the world as part of a long tradition of sharing our agricultural abundance with others," Secretary Johanns said. For example, in Afghanistan, the U.S. donation to the Mercy Corps will benefit around 30,000 farmers and their families by funding plant nurseries, irrigation improvements, and research to revive fruit and nut production. "This food aid program supports economic reforms and development that can help lift



NRCS program analyst **Arun Basu** (left), notes the amount on the check—\$3,000—he is turning over to Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment **Mark Rey** on January 31. The check represents contributions from NRCS's Asian Pacific Islander Organization (APIO). It was in response to Rey's earlier request that USDA employees consider making additional Combined Federal Campaign donations that would be specifically targeted to relief efforts in the aftermath of the tsunami which hit South Asia on December 26, 2004.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

people out of poverty and lead to more productive, open, entrepreneurial societies," Johanns said.

www.nutrition.gov: USDA launched a new website in late December that is designed to help people find answers to nutrition and food related questions. The site includes databases, recipes, interactive tools, and specialized information for infants and children, adult women and men, and seniors. A team of Registered Dietitians and nutrition information specialists at the Food and Nutrition Information Center of USDA's National Agricultural Library maintains the **www.nutrition.gov** site. The team works in cooperation with scientists and professionals at USDA's Agricultural Research Service, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and other federal partners. **www.nutrition.gov** supports the President's "HealthierUs Initiative" and expands on the nutrition information available on the **www.healthierus.gov** website, which also includes information on

physical fitness and making healthy choices.

Tobacco Transition Program: Sign-up for the Tobacco Transition Payment Program (TTPP) begins March 14 and extends through June 17, 2005. "We are pleased to be able to announce the beginning of the sign-up period for this historic program," Secretary Johanns said. "The TTPP will end the decades old tobacco marketing quotas and provide transition payments over a 10-year period." Johanns urged all tobacco quota holders and producers to visit their local USDA Service Centers to sign up for the program. In addition, USDA is working with Wachovia Corporation to help conduct an information campaign to ensure that all potential beneficiaries are made aware of the program and procedures. Town hall meetings will also be hosted in key tobacco-growing states, and a toll-free call center (1-866-887-0140 voice or 1-800-877-8339 TTY) will go into service March 1, 2005.—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

Employees *make these things happen*

Marketing and Regulatory Programs

We're Providing School Supply Kits To Primary School Students In Iraq

Recent headlines from Iraq have focused on the ability of Iraqi citizens to vote in the January 30 elections in that country. While that got the spotlight, employees from the Agricultural Marketing Service were quietly working behind the scenes, focusing on Iraqis who are too young to vote—but who aren't too young to learn.

Specifically, AMS employees recently completed an agencywide school supply drive, designed to collect school supply kits for the children of Iraq.

Karen Comfort is the chief of the administrative office in AMS's Dairy Programs. She explained that an AMS colleague knew of a person on active duty in Iraq. "That person had talked about the great need for school supplies over there," Comfort recalled. "In fact, private citizens had already launched a campaign—called 'Operation Iraqi Children'—to collect school supplies from sources in the U.S. and then get them disseminated throughout Iraq—by working with U.S. military personnel stationed in that country."

USDA employees have participated in such efforts in the past—but with different geographic destinations. Most recently, employees of the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services mission area collected composition books and pencils for primary school students in Sierra Leone. The Jan.-Feb. 2004 issue of the **USDA News** carried **Marcus Brownrigg's** story on that initiative.

Comfort coordinated the development of an AMS website on this project—with a link to the main Operation Iraqi Children website. The website pictured a sample school supply kit, and described exactly what was required in each one. The description emphasized contributions of new, not used, items. "Employees are also advised not to donate Federal Government office supplies to the Drive," the AMS site cautioned.

"I didn't want to reinvent the wheel here," Comfort emphasized. "I wanted to tap into the support structure that was in place already for Operation Iraqi Children." Along those lines, she found out that Federal Express, in partnership with Operation Iraqi Children, was providing free shipping for the school supply kits from the Oper-

ation's headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., to Iraq.

Comfort set up a system so that each AMS program area had a contact person, at both headquarters and field locations, to provide more localized coordination of AMS's school supply drive for Iraqi primary school students at targeted locations.

For instance, **Darryl Earnest**, AMS's associate deputy administrator for cotton programs, based in Memphis, had 'drop points' set up in the various offices within his building. He had considered the idea of making a competition out of the contributions. "But then I concluded that it was better to emphasize the 'team effort' in this undertaking, and not individualize it."

Debra Stutts, the lead billings and collections technician in AMS's poultry billing field office in Little Rock, sent out e-mails and flyers to fellow employees in her region, requesting school kits. She received both kits and monetary contributions that she, in turn, used to purchase kits. One employee—**Karen Howard**, an AMS shell egg grader in Norco, Calif.—included, in her kit, a note that read, "My son is serving in Iraq. The children over there are in need of so much."

Soon, based on numerous inquiries about Operation Iraqi Children from USDA employees outside of AMS, Comfort expanded the participation to include all of USDA. In turn, she found out that the Office of Operations' Central Supply Stores in Beltsville, Md., had 15 skids, or pallets, of items that USDA was no longer using. It needed to declare the items as 'excess property' and then, per normal procedure, transfer them to the General Services Administration.

"But I was contacted by **Nicole Jones** in that office about these items. She and I discussed whether those items might be useful for the students in Iraq," she recalled.

"We concluded that they would be," affirmed Jones, chief of Central Supply Stores. She provided Comfort with an itemized list of the obsolete items, including wooden rulers considered outdated, containers of blue ink, and typewriter ribbons—all items with a total value of over \$47,400.

"So I made arrangements to have them transferred from OO to AMS," Jones explained. "Then I arranged to have Federal Express pick up the 15 pal-

lets—and Fed Ex shipped them for free to Kansas City, with the ultimate destination being Iraq."

AMS formally completed its school supply drive on December 10. "But we decided to wait until after December for our 'packing and wrapping party' of virtually all the collected kits," Comfort explained. "The reason is that, although Federal Express had agreed to ship the kits for free from Kansas City to Iraq, December is Fed Ex's busiest shipping month because of the holidays. So we didn't want to impose that extra burden on them at that time."

Instead, the plan is to prepare the kits for shipment and then have that pallet of kits delivered to Kansas City later this winter.

So, how successful was this effort?

In a Jan. 26, 2005, memo to AMS employees, acting AMS Administrator **Ken Clayton** said, "...AMS collected 400 school supply kits for the children of Iraq... I want to recognize AMS field employees who really stepped up to show their support ... and contributed over 55 percent of the school supply kits for the children of Iraq."

Comfort estimated the value of the 400 kits at \$4,800, or about \$12 per kit.

"We all worked hard on this," Comfort affirmed. "But, hey, we pull out all the stops for schoolkids, right?"

—**RON HALL**



"No crayons in these kits, right?—since they melt during shipping overseas," affirms AMS's **Karen Comfort** (center), as she, AMS information technology specialist **Dora Flores** (left), and AMS web developer **Jessica Faust** are reviewing the contents of school supply kits in support of Operation Iraqi Children.—

PHOTO BY **LISA STEWART**

Natural Resources and Environment

It's A "Planner" That Combines History, Science, And Art

"This publication combines history and science and art in a way that appeals to all interests—and makes those subjects a whole lot

more fun."

Maxine Levin was describing the "2005 Soils Planner," which is this year's version of the combination wall calendar, guide to various types of soils, compendium of historical de-

scriptions, and planning tool which the Natural Resources Conservation Service has co-published and disseminated for the last seven years.

Levin, a soil scientist in NRCS's Soil Survey Division, explained that, "We really do see this item

Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Marc Hillson is the Chief Administrative Law Judge with USDA's Office of Administrative Law Judges.

Before joining USDA, from April 2000 until his selection for this position Hillson served as a member of the five-person Departmental Appeals Board at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In that position he reviewed decisions of HHS administrative law judges in cases involving violations of federal statutes and HHS regulations in such matters as compliance with nursing home regulations, exclusions from participation in federal health care programs, and alleged violations of provisions governing emergency health care. From 1999-2000 he was an administrative law judge with HHS in Washington, DC, after having worked as an administrative law judge with the Social Security Administration's Office of Hearings and Appeals in Wichita, Kan., from 1997-99.

Hillson worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency from 1977-97 in such positions as branch chief, field office chief, acting judicial officer, and senior attorney, and focused on such issues as enforcement of Title II of the Clean Air Act (pollution from mobile sources) and the Toxic Substances Control Act. He began his federal career as a staff attorney with the Occupational Safety and Health Division of the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, DC in 1972.

Jim Hunt, the previous Chief Administrative Law Judge in OALJ, retired from that position following 31 years of federal service. ■



Tom Hofeller is the associate administrator for operations and management in the Farm Service Agency.

From April 2003 until his appointment to this position Hofeller served as the director of FSA's Office of Business and Program Integration, focusing on economic

analysis, outreach programs, strategic planning, and eGovernment initiatives for FSA. He was the redistricting director for the Republican National Committee from 1999-2003, after having served as staff director of the U.S. House Subcommittee on the Census from 1998-99.

From 1995-97 Hofeller served as director of administration for Partes Corporation, a software development firm based in Kirkland, Wash. He was director of list development for Campaign Mail and Data, Inc., based in Falls Church, Va., from 1993-94. From 1989-93 he was the redistricting director for the National Republican Congressional Committee, after having worked from 1982-89 as the information technology director for the Republican National Committee.

Verle Lanier, the previous associate administrator for operations and management in FSA, retired from that position—having returned to USDA following his earlier retirement in 1994, after a 32-year career with the Department—with a total of 34 years of service at USDA. ■



Karen Stuck is the assistant administrator of the Office of International Affairs in the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

From November 1996 until her selection for this position Stuck served as chief of FSIS's Import-Export Policy Staff, after having been a division director in FSIS's [then] International Programs area from 1995-96. From 1990-95 she worked as a district manager in FSIS's Import Inspection Division.

Stuck was director of FSIS's [then] Information Office from 1983-89, after having worked as chief of that Office's Information Branch from 1981-83. She joined FSIS as a public affairs specialist in 1979. She worked for [then] U.S. Sen. **Dick Clark** of Iowa as the assistant press secretary from 1973-79, after having worked as a news reporter for the "*Sioux City Journal*" in Sioux City, Iowa from 1966-69.

This is a newly created position as part of an FSIS reorganization in 2003. ■

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as a tool which we in NRCS—and others, as well, for that matter—can use to, for instance, focus on upcoming mission-related conferences, workshops, and other similar activities."

The 12-month publication displays elongated color pictures of various types of soils in profile and identifies upcoming soil-related events and conferences around the country. NRCS historian **Douglas Helms** noted that it also describes several historical events related to the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, including information about the soils and ecology of the areas where explorers **Meriwether Lewis** and **William Clark** passed through.

In addition, the publication illustrates a number of "soil paintings" done by **Jan Lang**, a physical science technician with NRCS's National Soil Survey Lab in Lincoln, Neb. She took soil samples from the Lab, put them through a very fine mesh to make a 'soil powder,' then mixed the soil powder with water and a clear acrylic paint that adheres the soil to paper—thereby creating 'soil paints.'

Using her 'soil paints'—which come in virtually all colors except blue and whose thick-

ness varies, depending on the amount of water added to the mix—Lang then painted scenes from the Lewis and Clark Trail. The April-June 2003 issue of the **USDA News** carried **Joanna Pope's** profile on Lang and her soil paintings.

"In fact," Levin emphasized, "the reason why we feel that this year's version of our Soils Planner is particularly unique is that the whole Lewis and Clark Bicentennial really raised the interest level in our publication."

She said that NRCS teams up with the Soil Science Society of America and the Society for Range Management to share the production and dissemination of the Soils Planner.

Levin added that an estimated 100,000 copies of the 2005 version of the publication were printed. "It only costs about fifty cents a copy," she noted. The agency typically distributes the document to employees at USDA headquarters and field offices—for ultimate dissemination to the public. "A primary goal is to reach science instructors in junior high, high school, and college," she emphasized.

Randy Davis, the national soils program leader in the Forest Service, added that his agency distributes the publication to the Forest



"I think it's cool that these color pics show what various soils look like—down to six feet in the ground," affirms NRCS's **Maxine Levin**.—**PHOTO BY PAUL REICH**

Service-administered national forests and grasslands around the country. "They usually end up on the desks of our Forest Service soil scientists," he pointed out.

The 2005 Soils Planner also can be downloaded by clicking on **www.soils.usda.gov**

"It's the first year we put this publication on the website," Levin said. "Because of the great feedback we've been getting—literally from all over the world—we'll plan to emphasize this option in future years."

"People," she added, "just love to see those color photos of soil profiles—and get a clue about what goes on under the surface of the ground."

—**RON HALL**



Betting on a football game *can* be hazardous to your health—at least during a recent incident.

In fact, during that incident it literally might have been a 'deadly bet'—if not for the timely intervention of three employees with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Mike Hancock, an APHIS management analyst, was working at his

desk in the basement of the South Building at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. It was relatively quiet at 11 a.m. on Dec. 7, 2004—until a man stumbled into Hancock's office and blurted out, "Help me, big man. I've been stabbed!"

"The guy was clutching his stomach and had blood all over his shirt, and he was moaning a lot," Hancock recounted. "So I told him to lie down on the floor—because I knew that if you stand, then the heart has to pump faster—and that I'll call 911."

He did so—but after answering some initial questions from the 911 operator, Hancock advised the operator that he needed to hang up the phone to go help the victim. He then grabbed a handful of paper towels, plus some gauze from a first-aid kit that was conveniently located else-

where in his office, and began applying them to the man's wounds.

In the meantime, Hancock's coworker, APHIS facilities specialist **Shelly Queen**, had gotten wind of something happening from her office next door and came into the room—just as Hancock's phone began to ring. She then literally jumped over Hancock and the wounded man to grab the phone. Queen found a dispatcher with Federal Protective Service—the police force for federal agencies—on the other end, asking further questions.

"So I related to them what I was witnessing," she recalled. "I was watching Mike put pressure on the man's wounds—and he had multiple stab wounds in his chest, back, and left arm. I also repeated to the victim the questions that the FPS

dispatcher was asking me, like what was the victim's name and what happened—and then I relayed the victim's answers on."

Queen's office mate, APHIS information technology specialist **Renee Hamilton**, had also come into the office. Sizing up the situation, she began pinpointing the precise locations of the victim's wounds in order to help Hancock apply the gauze more accurately. Then, hanging up, Queen joined Hamilton in helping to calm the victim down and propping his head on a backpack she had found in the office.

The victim was yelling, "My arm! My leg!" "But I said to him, 'I'm not worried about your arm or leg—I'm worried about your stomach!'" Hancock noted. "The man was defi-

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PROFILE PLUS *More About: Keith Collins*



Keith Collins, USDA's Chief Economist, runs a relatively small office with a mighty mandate and a powerful reach. With about a \$10 million annual budget and 52 employees, the Office of the Chief Economist is responsible for USDA's commodity market forecasts and projections and for advising the Secretary on the economic implications of alternative programs, regulations, and legislative proposals.

A lot rides on OCE's expert analyses. Their projections underpin the President's budget, which is released in February, as well as the July mid-session budget review. The monthly projections on supply, demand, and prices also act as benchmarks used by analysts worldwide.

OCE also coordinates sustainable development activities among the agencies, energy analysis, and global climate change. In addition, it operates a joint agricultural weather facility staffed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and USDA meteorologists. That office provides weather intelligence to USDA analysts for assessing global agricultural issues and it produces the Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin, which has been in continuous publication since 1872. OCE's Office of Risk Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis is required by law to clear risk assessments for any Departmental rule making that could affect human health, human safety, or the environment and has an annual effect of \$100 million or more.

How do they do it? "We have few people but we leverage those people by coordinating with experts all across the Department," Collins said. For example, the supply and demand reports on crops and livestock are arrived at by consensus from 10 interagency committees chaired by folks from OCE's World Agricultural Outlook Board. "The result is we have one solid, consensus view on what to expect and we can all sing off the same page," he said.

Collins was born in Connecticut and educated at Villanova University, the University of Connecticut, and North Carolina State University, where he earned a Ph.D. in economics and statistics. His first job was with the Economic Research Service where he hoped to learn "a bit about public policy." Though he never intended to make government service a career, he has advised every Secretary of Agriculture since **John Block** on the

fine points of farm policy.

While Collins does a very good job as USDA's top analyst, having won the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Executive in 1990 and 1996 and for Distinguished Executive in 1992 and 2002, the highest award a Federal executive can receive, he is best known in agricultural circles for his skill at communicating the often arcane details of USDA programs and policies. A master at seeing and explaining cause and effect, he regards the numerous times he has testified on Capitol Hill as well as developing and implementing various farm bills as the high points of his career.

"I've done an enormous number of Congressional hearings conveying the Department's message and analysis. That gets your adrenalin going," he said. "Responding to Representatives like **Bob Goodlatte** (R-Va.) or **Charlie Stenholm** (formerly D-Texas) or Senators **Pat Roberts** (R-Kan.) or **Tom Harkin** (D-Iowa) or **Thad Cochran** (R-Miss.)—that stuff is high drama for an economist."

Collins also has relished working on every farm bill since 1985. "I have had important roles to play in developing USDA's proposals as well as the implementation of farm bills. I think that has been pretty exciting because they have been complex, they've been big, they've involved a lot of people in the Department, and that's been fun."

Still, he said, "There is always a deadline, always a deadline. There is never a time when something is not due. So you press a lot here."

Last Book Read: "*Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*," by **Mark Kurlansky**. Also one of the Lovejoy novels by **Jonathan Gash**, whose hero is an antique dealer who helps the British police solve crimes.

Last Movie Seen: "I can't remember, I don't go to many movies but I do want to see '*Sideways*'."

Hobbies: Sports and antique collecting

Favorite Food: Seafood

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "I see myself as a career public servant who is here to help the Department succeed every day in serving the public regardless of who else is here. So I focus my office on contributing the best way we can, using economics to help make our programs more effective, including those that I have responsibility for. We will work to contribute the most our office can to help the Secretary and the Department in achieving our strategic objectives."

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

nately in some pain.”

“By this time, I had a lot of blood on my hands,” he added.

About 10 minutes after the incident began, two paramedics arrived. “So we went out into the hallway to get out of the way,” Hamilton explained. They also gave statements to an FPS officer who, by now, had also arrived.

So, would the victim have bled to death without the help of the three APHIS employees?

“Well,” Hancock advised, “I found out later that the knife had gone into the man’s side—and then the perpetrator had moved the knife up the body, where it touched some organs and caused lots of internal bleeding. So maybe he could have bled to death, but I don’t know.”

“He was lucky to run into us—because we have strong stomachs,” Queen laughed. “Some of our colleagues later told us that ‘If I’d seen him, I’d run!’”

According to **Ken Lescallett**, director of the Protective Operations Division in the Office of Operations, immediately following the reporting of the incident USDA’s South Building was ‘locked down’ for about an hour as a security precaution. “Our employees in that building,” he explained, “were immediately notified, through an emergency notification system that overrides each employee’s office computer, not to enter or exit the building for an hour, since we wanted to give federal police officers time to search for the suspect.”

He added that, because of the building lockdown, both an eyewitness and the suspect were identified approximately two hours after that lockdown began.

Lescallett said subsequent investigations revealed that both the victim and the suspect were private sector maintenance contract employees at USDA. The stabbing, which took place in the

basement of USDA’s South Building, allegedly stemmed from a dispute about a \$10 bet placed on that previous evening’s Monday Night Football game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Seattle Seahawks.

According to **Cheryl Davis**, an FPS senior special agent who is the case agent on this incident, the victim continues to recover from his wounds and, at press time, the suspect was charged with aggravated assault while armed, was in jail pending prosecution, and was awaiting trial.

“We can practice emergency procedures and ‘what if?’ scenarios,” underscored OO Director **Priscilla Carey**. “But often it all comes down to employees being willing to help out in an emergency.”

“We’re all lucky that Mike, Shelly, and Renee stepped up to the plate and helped out.” ■

—**RON HALL**

Budget...continued from pg. 1

expiring programs; strengthen crop insurance delivery to ensure that farmers have adequate yield and price protection; expand international market opportunities through compliance monitoring and enforcement of trade agreements; support home ownership opportunities in rural America; save or create 56,400 jobs in rural America; provide for continued protection of America’s supply of meat, poultry, and egg products; prevent the introduction or spread of foreign animal diseases and pests that spread and cause severe economic or environmental damage or damage to the health of animals or humans; conduct testing and research related to Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or ‘mad cow disease’; support an estimated 29.1 million food stamp participants; support a monthly average of 8.5 million low-income, nutritionally at-risk Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) participants; provide record levels of funding for financial and technical assistance to enhance the conservation of natural resources on private lands; reduce the risk from catastrophic fire and implement the President’s Healthy Forests Initiative; improve Departmental services and systems; and promote civil rights.

USDA’s FY 2006 proposed budget calls for nearly \$94.6 billion in spending. This represents a slight decline from the Department’s cur-

rently estimated spending for FY 2005 of over \$94.9 billion. Still, due to increases in farm program costs and domestic nutrition assistance, the FY 2006 budget proposal is well above USDA’s spending for FY 2004 of \$72 billion.

USDA’s budget proposes a federal staffing level for FY 2006 of 100,494 full-time equivalent positions, or federal staff years. This is a decrease of 2,816 federal staff years from the currently estimated FY 2005 federal staff year level of 103,310.

Agencies that reflect proposed increases in federal staff years for FY 2006 include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (an increase of 384 federal staff years, to total 7,145 federal staff years), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (29, to total 1,395), the Office of the Chief Information Officer (24, to total 1,137), the Food Safety and Inspection Service (22, to total 9,783), and the Risk Management Agency (17, to total 585).

Agencies with proposed decreases in federal staff years include the Natural Resources Conservation Service (a decrease of 1,939 federal staff years, to total 11,688 federal staff years), the Forest Service (1,336, to total 35,962), the Farm Service Agency (24, to total 5,474), and the Foreign Agricultural Service (20, to total 982).

In addition, the temporary non-federal county staff years of FSA are projected to decrease by 250—

reflecting a decline in disaster-related workloads—for a total of 10,284 non-federal staff years for FY 2006.

These federal staff year estimates are all subject to adjustments to reflect the final outcome of budget negotiations, and such unpredictable factors as natural disasters and other emergencies.

Highlights of USDA’s FY 2006 budget proposal, thought to be of particular interest to employees, include:

① \$142 million—an increase of \$17 million—for continued upgrading of technology in county office Service Centers. This provides for the continued replacement of aging business and technology systems with a Common Computing Environment (CCE) in those offices. That allows the Service Center agencies (FSA, NRCS, and Rural Development) to share data among themselves and their customers and to streamline business processes. Implementation of the CCE began in 1998 and most of its major hardware and software components are in place. This is all designed to increase the ability of USDA customers to interact with USDA staffers over the Internet, so as to save time and money.

② \$20 million on efforts to strengthen civil rights and equal treatment under USDA programs. This includes funding to process allegations of discrimination in a more timely manner, plus funding

to improve tracking and analysis of allegations of discrimination.

③ \$376 million in USDA funding—an increase of \$78 million—as part of the governmentwide “Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative” which began in 2004. USDA’s contribution is to go to such activities as: strengthening the Food Emergency Response Network and the Regional Diagnostic network to ensure the capacity to respond quickly to food emergencies and plant and animal diseases; developing improved animal vaccines; increasing surveillance and monitoring activities; and completing construction of USDA’s National Centers for Animal Health in Ames, Iowa.

In addition, in November 2004 nearly 800 staff years were transferred from the three Service Center agencies to OCIO to manage a new organization named “Information Technology Services”—which consolidates the information technology support functions of the Service Center agencies under one office. This is designed to ensure the support and coordination of infrastructure operations at USDA offices around the country.

For more details on USDA’s proposed staffing levels, as well as additional details on other aspects of USDA’s proposed budget for FY 2006, click on www.usda.gov/budget.xml

USDA’s proposed budget for FY 2006 was transmitted to Congress on February 7. ■



"Whoops, now I've got this tape wrapped around my finger-nail," quips **Gail Knight** (left), the administrative support assistant at AMS's Fruit and Vegetable Processed Products Branch Office in Winter Haven, Fla. She and assistant officer-in-charge **Phyllis Towns** are methodically sorting school supply kit materials as part of Operation Iraqi Children. These school supplies were donated by AMS employees from that Florida field office. According to AMS's **Karen Comfort**, Operation Iraqi Children's goal was to provide school supply kits to students in Iraq. Note the story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY KATE YULE**



Help Us Find **Jessica Soung Hee Darbro**

Missing: **9-4-2002**

From: **El Cajon, CA**

D.O.B. **1-15-1988**

Sex: **Female**

Hair: **Black**

Eyes: **Brown**

Height: **5 ft. 3 in.**

Weight: **185 lbs.**

If you have information, please call

1-800-843-5678

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

USDA-Sponsored Calendar Highlights

■ **Month of March**

Women's History Month

USDA headquarters and field offices

(202) 720-7314 or (202) 720-6382 (TTY)

■ **Month of March**

National Nutrition Month

USDA headquarters and field offices

(703) 305-2298 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

■ **May 2-8**

Public Service Recognition Week

USDA headquarters and field offices

(202) 690-4750 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250



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